HIST 1421-01 Greek and Roman Civilization

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Written Assignment Unit 4

Rome's road to democracy was full of struggles against kingship. In ancient Rome, the monarchy was ruled by powerful leaders who oppressed the freedom and equality of citizens. In 509 BCE, the last king, Tarquin the Proud, was overthrown, leading to the declaration of the Roman Republic and the establishment of a new political system. This paper will explore the circumstances that led to the establishment of the Roman Republic, the democratic elements of the Republic, and the elements that call into question its democratic nature.

**Circumstances Leading to the Establishment of the Roman Republic**

The collapse of the Roman monarchy began with the citizens' revolt against the tyranny of Tarquin the Proud. His despotic rule and the misconduct of his family incited the anger of the people, leading to his expulsion in 509 BCE. This event was set against the backdrop of conflicts between the patricians (aristocrats) and the plebeians (commoners). The patricians sought to abolish the monarchy and establish a republic to distribute political power and encourage citizen participation(Johnson, 2005).

The Republic was established by Lucius Junius Brutus and other aristocrats, who introduced the system of consuls, elected annually to prevent the concentration of power. Additionally, the Senate was established as the principal decision-making body in politics(Lintott, 1999).

**Democratic Elements of the Roman Republic**

Several elements of the Roman Republic had democratic characteristics. First, the roles of consuls and the Senate were crucial. Consuls were elected by citizens, served one-year terms, and had limited opportunities for re-election, which helped prevent abuse of power and better reflected the citizens' opinions. The Senate, comprised of experienced aristocrats, was responsible for significant decisions and policy-making(Cary & Scullard, 1975).

The establishment of the Plebeian Council was another critical democratic element. The Plebeian Council functioned as a body where commoners could gather and protect their rights. It held legal authority and was vital in reflecting the plebeians' political opinions. Moreover, the codification of laws with the Twelve Tables promoted legal transparency and equality(Forsythe, 2005).

**Elements Questioning the Democratic Nature of the Roman Republic**

However, several elements cast doubt on the democratic nature of the Roman Republic. First, the issue of aristocratic dominance was significant. Many senators were of aristocratic origin, maintaining their political influence. As a result, aristocratic political control persisted, and plebeian opinions were sometimes inadequately represented(Lintott, 1999).

Additionally, property qualifications for elections were problematic. Elective participation required a certain level of property ownership, excluding poorer citizens from political participation. These property qualifications limited actual political participation and questioned the democratic nature of the Republic(Johnson, 2005).

Furthermore, violence and corruption were present in Roman politics. Political conflicts often escalated into violence, and corruption was widespread. As a result, fair politics were sometimes not practiced, and the democratic system did not function effectively(Forsythe, 2005).

The establishment of the Roman Republic was realized through the collapse of the monarchy and the citizens' revolt. In the Republic, several democratic elements, such as the election of consuls, the establishment of the Plebeian Council, and the codification of laws with the Twelve Tables, were evident. However, aristocratic dominance, property qualifications for elections, and political violence and corruption raised questions about its democratic nature. The history of the Roman Republic provides significant lessons for modern democracy, emphasizing the importance of transparency and fairness in political systems.

Word-Count: 548

References

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